

# U.S. unlikely to intervene in Haiti

## Officials push for political solution

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON, D.C. — A decade ago, President Clinton dispatched 20,000 troops to help restore democracy in Haiti during a political crisis there. A repeat performance is highly unlikely this year, officials say, even though Haiti is once again bordering on chaos. For one thing, in 1994 there was an elected president-in-waiting, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, ready to replace the military junta that had deposed him three years earlier.

Haitians were eager to have him back, and there was joy on the streets when Aristide flew back to Port-au-Prince a month after the U.S. military forced out the coup regime. Aristide is president again but much of his support has slipped away in the face of accusations that elections were rigged in 2000 and that he has violently suppressed dissent and allowed corruption to flourish while the populace suffers. If the United States orchestrat-

ed his removal it would be a matter of replacing an elected president with someone who had no claim at all to lead the country. This, officials note, would hardly qualify as striking a blow for democracy. So for now the administration policy is to stick with Aristide for lack of a credible alternative, and push for a political solution to the armed rebellion that is sweeping through Haiti. "There is frankly no enthusiasm right now for sending in military or police forces to put down the violence," Secretary of State Colin Powell said Tuesday. In 1994, Clinton was under pres-

sure from the Congressional Black Caucus to reinstate Aristide. Clinton also had a mandate from the U.N. Security Council to use all means necessary to achieve that result. A U.S. economic embargo, while failing to force out the military government, was causing Haitians even more hardship than usual. Also, there were 14,000 Haitian refugees being housed at the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo Naval Base, Cuba. The U.S. military wanted the Haitians repatriated but could do so only if the repressive regime they had fled was deposed and the elected government reinstalled.

Many supported the U.S. invasion because of the sinister nature of the regime led by Gen. Raoul Cedras and his colleagues. They were believed responsible for the deaths of thousands. None of these elements are present these days. Among the congressional dissenters a decade ago was former N.C. Sen. Jesse Helms. "Aristide may have won an election, but he's not likely to win a medal for promoting true democracy," Helms said on the eve of the invasion. Nowadays, many in the administration — and in Haiti — would agree with Helms.

Aristide's government has accomplished little but, then again, he has received minimal support from Washington, which contends that he has violated democratic norms. Assistance from the United States and other donor countries has been limited in recent years to food and other forms of humanitarian aid. "They've cut off aid to the government and starved them of resources," says James Dobbins, a former State Department Haiti expert. "They've gone to the opposite extreme of the Clinton administration."

# Gell conviction overturned

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WINDSOR — A prisoner taken off death row after a judge ruled prosecutors withheld key evidence in his murder trial was found not guilty Wednesday in a second trial. Alan Gell, 28, has spent a decade behind bars in the 1995 murder of retired truck driver Allen Ray Jenkins, who was shot twice during a robbery. The case has led to calls for North Carolina to impose a moratorium on executions, and the verdict likely will fuel the debate. Prosecutors who handled Gell's retrial were not seeking the death penalty, but Gell faced an automatic life term if convicted. Prosecutors left court without comment. N.C. Attorney General Roy Cooper released a statement saying he was "confident that a thorough presentation of the evidence was made" by both sides.

Asked whether he harbors hard feelings against the state, Gell replied, "No comment. As you all know, there was some misconduct." Jenkins' body was found on April 14, 1995, inside his home in Aulander. Prosecutors built a case against Gell based on the testimony of two teenagers, Crystal Morris and Shanna Hall, Gell's former girlfriend, who testified that they saw Gell pull the trigger and kill Jenkins during a robbery on April 3, 1995. But prosecutors in Gell's original trial withheld from defense lawyers a secretly taped phone call in which Morris, who was then 15 years old, did not answer when her boyfriend asked her twice whether Gell killed Jenkins. She also told her boyfriend she had to "make up a story" about Jenkins' death. Also withheld by prosecutors were statements from more than a

dozen witnesses who said they saw Jenkins alive after April 3. Gell was either out of state or in jail on a car-theft charge from April 4 until after Jenkins' body was found April 14. During the retrial, three scientific experts testified that Jenkins' body and the scene of his killing were not consistent with the prosecution's argument that he was killed 11 days prior. Charles Jenkins, the older brother of the murder victim, said watching Gell go free was "hard on everybody." His wife, Maxine Jenkins, remained convinced of Gell's guilt. Investigators found no physical evidence such as hair, blood, fingerprints or fibers linking Gell to Jenkins' death. Police found the shotgun and other items in July 1995 after Morris and Hall told them where they had been hidden. Both Hall and Morris reached

plea bargains with prosecutors in which they promised to testify truthfully in return for being allowed to plead guilty to second-degree murder and receive sentences of nearly 10 years in prison. Gell's acquittal came less than two weeks after Darryl Hunt was cleared of all charges in a 1984 rape and killing in Winston-Salem. Hunt, who was found guilty of the murder of Deborah Sykes at two jury trials, was freed in December after a DNA test pinned the crime on another man, who has since confessed. On that same day, Feb. 6, the state Supreme Court overturned two death sentences, ordering a new trial in one case and a new sentencing in the other. The state Senate approved a death penalty moratorium bill last year, but the bill was never taken up by the state House.

# Parents lobby for later start

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RALEIGH — Students are missing out on family vacations and summer jobs because North Carolina school systems start classes earlier than ever, a parents' group said Wednesday. Joined by two legislators, the parents said they would lobby for General Assembly action this year to require all public schools to begin after Labor Day, the traditional start in many states. A similar bill almost reached the Senate floor last year before it was pulled. Education groups that oppose the change say local boards and many parents prefer August starts. Ninety-two of the 100 county school systems started school this year by the first two weeks of August, including a July 30 start date in Hoke County, according to the group Save Our Summers-North Carolina.

and eliminates teenage labor, backed efforts last year to get a Labor Day bill through the Senate. That measure was pulled from the Senate floor when dozens of school systems asked to be exempt. Last year, parents weren't well organized to get the word out, said Rep. Connie Wilson, R-Mecklenburg, who authored a similar proposal in the House. This year, parents organized Save Our Summers and set up a Web site, where organizers said 3,000 people already have logged on to back the requirement. Wednesday's speakers cited a study that students in states that start later perform better on standardized tests. Bill opponents also attended the news conference and told reporters afterward that setting an after-Labor Day requirement wouldn't lengthen vacation, but cut into it in June instead of August. North Carolina law states that school must set up a 220-day school calendar, 180 as actual instruction days. Teachers must have six weeks off in the summer. In Wilson County, for example, the last day of school for the 2004-05 calendar would be pushed back from May 25 to June 22 if the post-Labor Day requirement was passed. Supporters of a September start argue it will save school money in cooling costs. Opponents contend many teachers prefer to teach students during hot months at the beginning of the year rather than at the end, when pupils are restless.

# Congress mail security revamped

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The House and the Senate are initiating new mail inspection procedures, including the opening of all mail at an off-site location, after the latest discovery of a deadly substance in the postal system. Under new protocols, all letters will be removed from envelopes and then reinserted and resealed after being found safe, House Sergeant at Arms Bill Livingood and Chief Administrative Officer Jay Eagen said in a letter to House members. The Senate Sergeant at Arms

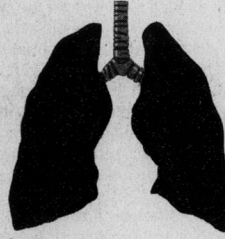
office said similar measures would be adopted on the Senate side. Since 2001, when a letter containing anthrax was sent to the office of then-Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, all first class mail to the Capitol is first sent to an off-site inspection center where the corner of the envelope is cut and the envelopes are sterilized through irradiation and tested for toxins. But mail service was again disrupted and Senate office buildings closed Feb. 2 when the toxin ricin was found in the mailroom of Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist.

But Rep. Dennis Kucinich, D-Ohio, who is running for the Democratic presidential nomination, wrote the two officials Tuesday, asking them to suspend the new procedures, which he said raised privacy concerns. He also questioned having the testing outsourced to a private corporation. Rep. Bob Ney, R-Ohio, chairman of the House Administration Committee, said he planned to expand an experiment in which mail is scanned before reaching the Capitol and then sent electronically to lawmakers' offices.

A dozen House offices have participated in the project since the anthrax scare, and Ney recently said he planned to expand the digital mail program to 25 offices. Mail to congressional offices was suspended after the ricin incident, but it is to resume in the Senate this week and the House next week. Livingood and Eagan said that the House has received more than 600,000 pieces of first class mail in that period, and that delivery delays will continue for several months while the new system is implemented.

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